
THE MCA ADVISORY

The Newsletter of Medal Collectors of America

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The Board of Medal Collectors of America has encouraged me to launch publication of a regular periodical. Initially, this publication will have a strong orientation toward news: important dates for medal collectors, upcoming auctions, auction prices, book reviews and the like.

Post launch, I will be looking for articles on all segments of our hobby. Joining me will be John Kraljevitch (U.S. auctions) Chris Eimer (European auctions), Don Scarinci (modern art medals), Dale Krueger (Goetz medals), Dick Johnson (various), and Dave Alexander (everything). Hopefully, volunteers will step forward to organize other fields of interest. (John W. Adams)

Who We Are

Medal Collectors of America (MCA) was founded in August 1998 at the Portland, Oregon, convention of the American Numismatic Association (ANA). Its primary purpose was to serve COLLECTORS of world and U.S. art and historical medals. MCA would bring together those interested in collecting, research and publication of research concerning art and historical medals.

During his years as a collector and especially during the seven years he served as a full-time writer and editor at Coin World, MCA founder David T. Alexander became aware that in the

vast landscape of American Numismatics, COLLECTORS of medals had never had their own organization.

Virtually all other specialties, from World War II Ration Tokens to Pioneer Gold, Colonial Coppers to Bust Half Dollars were served by organizations devoted solely to their interest area. No organization for COLLECTORS of art and historical medals had ever existed for more than a few months. When setting out to create the new group, however, it was emphasized that MCA was not going to compete with any existing organization.

There were three of groups involved tangentially with art and historical medals. The Token and Medal Society (TAMS) began more than 40 years ago as the Token, Medal and Obsolete Paper Society. As most organizations do, it evolved over the years, and Obsolete Paper was quickly abandoned. By 1998 TAMS' primary focus was on U.S. tokens. Medals collecting had not been a primary concern since the early 1970's.

Orders and decorations (often referred to simply as "medals" by the uninitiated) were well served by the Orders and Medals Society of America (OMSA). That prestigious group did not address either art or historical medals and MCA has left Orders and Decorations in OMSA's capable hands.

The American Medallic Sculpture Association (AMSA) was founded in 1982. Alexander was a member of its founding Board of Directors and in 1983 wrote a comprehensive history of the American medals for AMSA's first exhibition catalogue.

Here again, however, evolution was soon at work. AMSA was founded to serve both producers and collectors of medallic art. In its earliest years, however, AMSA turned away from the collector and devoted itself almost exclusively to the interests of sculptors of those wishing recognition as sculptors. MCA has a profound admiration for medallic sculptors, applauds AMSA's service to that field and leaves it to them.

To reiterate, MCA exists to serve the COLLECTOR of art and historical medals. Its publications, The MCA Advisory and The Medal Cabinet provide a forum for research, news and views in the medal field. It encourages research and publication and recognizes excellence through its annual Carl W.A. Carlson Award. With five years of steady growth under its belt, MCA is here to stay as the spokesman of a significant but long-neglected area of numismatics in this country. (David T. Alexander)

Our Calendar

1. 1/17/2004 – MCA Club Meeting at the New York International Show
2. 4/3/2004 – COAC to be held at the new location of the American Numismatic Society in downtown New York.
3. 6/1/2004 – Kolbe/Stacks' auction of the John J. Ford, Jr. Library, Part I. Venue will be California.
4. 8/18-8/22/2004 – ANA Convention in Pittsburgh. Our meeting date has not yet been selected.

Conference on Americas Coinage

The American Numismatic Society has kindly invited us to organize this year's COAC on April 3rd. The subject matter will be Betts medals and near relatives ("Betts" medals are those regardless of country, having relevance to the settling of the Western Hemisphere). Presentations should be 15 to 20 minutes, allowing 10 to 15 minutes for Q&A. The subsequent printed paper can be of virtually any length. If you think you have a good topic, please contact the editor ASAP as the speaking slots are likely to fill quickly. At all costs, save the date and plan to see the new A.N.S. headquarters in downtown New York.

New Publication

Peter Bertram has just published "The Southern Cross of Honor: Historical Notes and Trial List of Varieties." Sixty pages in length with a paper cover, this work describes 14 varieties of the medal along with 7 reproductions. It contains 175 b&w illustrations. Copies may be obtained from the author for \$21.50: Peter Bertram, P.O. Box 451421, Atlanta, GA, 31145-1421.

Perhaps some member who has read this work will favor us with a review.

Comitia Americana Project

John Adams and Anne Bentley of the Massachusetts Historical Society are conducting a census of Comitia Americana medals. Source documents note Thomas Jefferson's proposal to produce 300 sets of these medals along with Congress' approval of the same. Given a seemingly modest corpus of modern survivors, it is clear that a much lesser number of specimens were actually struck. The MHS census hopes to achieve a reasonable estimate of the surviving population of each of the 12 Comitia medals. Preliminary results may be discussed at the MCA meeting in New York on January 17th and/or at COAC on April 3rd.

Missing Persons

Does anyone know where to reach the following members whose addresses have apparently changed?

Tom Beemam
Charles Hubbard
Arthur Kay
Lt. Marcus McDonald
Tom Rinaldo
Charles Roach
Leonard Vaccaro

E-Mail Addresses

Ye editor would like to convert this periodical in whole or in part to e-mail. The readership has been slow to submit e-mail addresses.

Louis Oscar Roty

The great granddaughter of Louis Oscar Roty in France is attempting to gather specimens of her ancestor's medallic creations. "Please contact me if you have something [for sale?]" she

wrote on September 24th in one of the collector chat rooms. She listed both her own e-mail address: Rida Roty (ridaroty @tiscali.fr) and also a website listing some of her famous relative's medallic work:
http://www.finemedals.com/oscar_roty.htm. (Dick Johnson)

Felicitas Britannia at America

The only medal catalogued in the John J. Ford, Jr. Collection, Part I, is a superb example of Felicitas Britannia (Betts 614). This piece follows nine(!!) continental dollars, with which it shares a common reverse design howbeit from a distinct die.

Felicitas Britannia is dated September 4th, 1783, the day following the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty. The date, the motto and the allegorical scene, which depicts America approaching Britannia with a dove in between, all serve to make the purpose of the medal transparent. Some person or organization wants to commemorate the happy event as well as the happy times which lie ahead.

Whereas the purpose of the medal is clear, no one has discovered the engraver of the dies or the location of manufacture. C.W. Betts, Laurence Brown, Carl Carlson, and John Kraljevich (the cataloguer of a specimen in LaRiviere III) all conclude that the medal was made in America. In favor of a domestic source, John K. cites 1) the satisfaction a patriotic engraver would have in pairing the peace scene with the classic 13 links reverse and 2) the likely demand for such a medal in this country.

Michael Hodder, who was once in the American camp, changes his

mind in Ford I and places the execution in Britain. He bases this conclusion partly on engraving style and the fact that a skyline of London is depicted in the background. However, his most convincing argument (not given in the catalogue) is that a scene wherein American stands and Britannia is seated suggests a British point of view.

Some day, clever research will uncover the source of this mysterious medal. We will give the last word on the subject to the present owner of Lot 10: John Ford believes that Felicitas Britannia was made in America because the inaccurate (by one day) date and the clumsy rendering of St. Paul's on the skyline bespeak a designer who is getting his information second hand. Moreover, the leaved edges are strongly reminiscent of two other American productions: the Continental dollar and Richardson's 1757 peace medal.

Hopefully, one of our readers will be motivated to unearth the truth about this longstanding mystery. In some contemporary newspaper, there is a trail. (John W. Adams)

A Few Good Men

Medal Collectors of America is looking for a Treasurer. The duties are relatively light but, from the standpoint of good governance, we need to separate the executive and financial functions of the club.

Christopher Eimer writes:

The Autumn season of London auctions was kicked off by Morton & Eden, who, in conjunction with Stack's, were selling the first part of the Dr. King collection. This was an all-medal affair,

encompassing both military and commemorative medals, and put together with equal fervour by the late Arthur B. King. Dr. King had been buying in both the United Kingdom and the United States for over fifty years, and amongst the familiar U.K. provenances were those of Seaby and Spink.

Among the highlights of the collection was the gold Mysore medal, awarded 1791-92 by the Honorable East India Company. One of just a handful known, this piece fetched the hammer price of £22,000 against an estimate of £10,000-15,000. Another choice piece, contained within glazed lunettes was a gold Seringapatam of 1799 medal which fetched £13,000 (est. £4000-6000).

Of interest to Betts collectors were two examples of the Carib War medal (Betts 529). The first was a standard example, cast and chased in the normal manner, and this made £620. Immediately following was a beautifully chased and embellished example, which deservedly sold for £1800. Both examples were unsigned, while that listed by Betts is signed on the truncation by Moser, as indeed are others. George Michael Moser was a celebrated chaser, known most notably for his work on watchcases. Against that background, one can well understand how the second of the two medals sold came to be so highly and skillfully worked.

This part of the collection comprised a total of 675 lots, and sold for £556,850. On top of this figure, and the individual prices here quoted, is to be added the auction premium, which in this case amounted to a little more than 20%. What this sale demonstrates is that despite some high individual prices, there are still many interesting medals

from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries which can still be acquired for relatively modest sums. How long that situation will remain is anyone's guess, but the supply of such- material is finite. Part II of the King collection comprises medals of North American interest and will be offered in New York in Spring 2004.

Goetz Medals

Like many collectors of numismatic material, my early efforts began in grade school, (in the early '70's) filling Whitman folders, sifting through hundreds of rolls of cents and nickels from the bank, with a few much anticipated trips to a local coin shop or coin show at the local mall. Like many of my peers, my love for coins faded temporarily through high school and college, only to reappear after I began my career. But here is where the first transition began. Where before I could not afford, or even contemplate high-grade coins, I found myself in the late '80's drawn into the wonderful world of Mint State specimens, Barber Quarters in particular. I remember thinking at that time, "why would anyone bother collecting circulated coins?" Obviously I had forgotten the love and immense pleasure my humble old collection had brought me at one time. Ironically, I also said to my self at that time, "Why would anyone buy an MS-65 for \$10,000, when they could buy an MS 63 that looks just as nice for \$1000?"

Soon another transition began. Before long, as I read, researched, studied, and looked at hundreds of MS coins, my perception was reversed to "why would anyone ever buy an MS 63, they should only buy at least an MS-65, and even those probably have a problem!" Yes, through practice, experience, and study of the nuances

of grading, I was truly lost in the wonder and awe of high-grade mint state coins! Sometime during this period of worship of high-grade coins in the early or mid '90's, I happened to pick up a pattern done by Karl Goetz. I had no idea who Karl Goetz even was, and wouldn't know for several years. I don't even know why I bought the piece; I think subconsciously I must have recalled the name from an article I had skimmed in the Numismatist.

The pattern lurked in the recesses of my collection for several years, until the FUN show in January 1999. While there, I took a break from the tables by looking at the numismatic books, new and used, being offered in one of the corner sections of the floor. I found, and immediately bought what seemed to be a brand new edition of "The Medals of Karl Goetz" by G.W. Kienast. "AHA!", I thought... "Now I'll finally find out about that weird coin or medal or whatever it is I've got."

I read the book and I was captivated and intrigued. I also found out that the mystery medal I had was a 1913 Bavarian King Ludwig 10 Mark pattern. A new transition had begun! And this one happened to coincide with my first feeble attempts to explore eBay. Within weeks I had purchased several British Iron copies of K156 (sinking of the Lusitania), several K-386's (Hindenburg 5Mark pattern), and a few K-360's (chamber of commerce) medals--all for approximately 10 times their real value! Obviously, "just buying the book" isn't enough. But the fun had only just begun. No more slabs, no more late nights of deliriously peering at coins through a microscope wondering if it could really be a MS67. I could now buy medals with scuffs, spots, even scratches! Soon I discovered there

were many more of us "reformed high grade junkies" out there. It was truly an exciting new frontier.

As the old era ended, I auctioned off my now completed high-grade set of Barber Quarters. (Does anyone ever really make money on their collections of US coins, other than Senators who collect Mercury dimes, bankers that put their set together in the '50's, or attorneys who write articles for Coin World?) I found it hard to believe I was parting with something that at one time had such meaning and personal value for me--but the transition was complete.

New experiences lay ahead--overseas auctions, learning about the nuances of Goetz medals from the dealers that specialize in them, corresponding with the many other like-minded collectors, discovering new varieties not listed in the Kienast reference books, finding numerous unattributed Goetz medals on eBay, and yes.... even selling my duplicates...and even making a profit! At least half the fun of collecting is the camaraderie between those of like interests.

Through the years, many of the Goetz collectors I have corresponded with seemed to have the same questions; how much is this medal worth? How rare is this medal? What is the right color for this medal? We have also discussed a newsletter, club, or some type of price guide. These medals are so interesting, unusual, and so full of historical context, that I feel they will only grow in popularity. At one time not too long ago, I couldn't have fathomed why anyone would ever collect medals. I now find myself asking a new question--"Why wouldn't anyone find these

medals intriguing?" I would hope that MCA will be a format for all of you out there that collect these medals to share your knowledge, discoveries, experiences, theories, and research.
(Dale Krueger)